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" 'Indian Look-Out,' below Iowa City."

by
David Goodwin

The following article by a Johnson County native shows the rewards and frustrations of historical research. Although not by training an historian, the author is an indefatigable researcher among diversified and widely scattered records. On one level, the article might be understood as an historical puzzle to be solved: what was, and is, Indian Lookout? On a more theoretical level the article might be regarded as the writer's attempt to locate himself in time and place. More specifically in this same context, it might be viewed as the author's collection and interpretation of data about the land he owns and the place where he lives. Dr. Goodwin has a deep respect for the past of this particular place and he is concerned about its future. Modern highway engineers propose, in the words of a "Draft Environmental Statement," to construct Freeway 518 "approximately one-half mile west of the true and historically significant Indian Lookout."

A growing realization of our times is that people must respect places and use them wisely in the interests of society as a whole and of individual members of society, as well as in the interests of the environment itself. Historical information about places is important because it can offer valuable perspective for decision makers. Yet by itself, such perspective does not dictate a specific course of action.

Regardless of how this article is interpreted, it is a good example of an adventure in history at the local level. The Editors.

Four miles south of the Old Stone Capitol stands Indian Lookout, a steep and wooded bluff bounding on the west the spacious Iowa River valley. The natural beauty of the location mingled with history and legend in the minds of the early settlers, and sparked the genius of one of Iowa's early artists. Once recognized as a prime point of interest, it is now unfamiliar to the people of the immediate locality. This landmark invites re-discovery.

The Legend

Legends thrive upon conviction and evidence—often more of the former than the latter. When writing about Indian Lookout, local nineteenth century historians drew upon their own memories as well as upon stories passed down by word of mouth. A settler of the year 1839, Captain F. M. Irish, wrote in his 1868 *History of Johnson County, Iowa*:¹

Passing from Iowa City, on the west side of the Iowa, to the southward, the first object of note is the hill called the Indian Lookout, a high, towering knob or point. In the river valley, to the east of this hill and the river, the Indians once occupied a town or village. This spot they had inhabited for a long time previous to the settlement of the country by the whites, and continued to inhabit it after their coming. Here it was that these dusky people spent their idle hours in feasting and dancing, and on the lofty hill to the west the old men kept watch and ward. A most suitable place was the top of this hill for such guardianship, for it towers

¹*Annals of Iowa* (1st ser.), 6, No. 4 (October 1868), 323.

above all the surrounding country. To the east, from its top, can be seen the most of Scott and Pleasant Valley townships. To the south and west, on a clear morning, is presented a most lovely view. Stretched out before and beneath you is the broad valley of Old Man's creek, checkered with farms, dotted with farm houses, and bordered by the heavy timber on the creek, relieved by a dim background of the distant hills beyond.

This account generates more confusion than clarity about the location of Indian Lookout and the story behind it. The elevation is indeed well above the river valley which lies to the east, but modern topographic data show that Indian Lookout does not tower above other bluffs below Iowa City. Irish's assertion that most of Scott township is visible from this vantage point is hyperbole.

When Professor Charles Tuttle wrote his *History of Iowa* in 1876, he questioned the associations which Captain Irish and others had ascribed to Indian Lookout. Tuttle explained that below Iowa City there is "a singular looking peak or peculiarly rounded hill . . . which has been named 'Indian Lookout,' but whether that title describes the use to which it was really put, or is merely due to the lively fancies of the new coming white men, cannot be determined." (p. 554). In the copy of Tuttle's book at the Iowa City Public Library there is an example of conviction sustaining legend. Someone has pointed an arrow toward Tuttle's "lively fancies" and written as marginalia: "Bunk. This was where the Indians kept their lookout & counsel [sic] fires."

Based on evidence furnished him by W. F. Smith of Washington Township, the anonymous compiler of an 1883 *History of Johnson County* gives a different orientation to the legend which he discusses under the heading, "The Old-Man's Creek Story." (p. 762).

The Musquakies and other Sac and Fox tribes were at mortal enmity with certain Sioux tribes on the headwaters of the Iowa river, and beyond. And when the Sac and Foxes were ready to make a foray on their up stream enemies they would send their non-combatants onto Papato [Old Man's] creek for concealment In Liberty township, about four or five miles up the creek from its mouth, and then about a mile from the creek there is a high knoll of land between the creek and the river; from the top of this knoll both streams can be seen; and also the surrounding country for a great many miles. This place is called the 'Indian lookout,' and formed a waymark to reckon localities from in its neighborhood by the early settlers, but had been used by the Indians to watch for their returning warriors coming down the river with good or bad news, or with enemies pursuing, and communicate it by a short run of a mile or two to the home camp, when the canoes would have to go eight or ten miles farther around by the way of the streams.

The compiler then asserts, "Mr. Smith's explanation has at least the merit of practical probability and common sense to it" Indeed, modern observation proves that both the Iowa River and Old Man's Creek can be seen from Indian Lookout. However, a note printed at the bottom of the page questions Smith's concept of location. "Mr. D. W. Wood reports that



Courtesy of the University of Iowa Library, Special Collections.

Figure One. George Yewell's pencil sketch of "Indian Look-Out, below Iowa City," dated October 28, 1854. This drawing was evidently made on the hunting trip which Yewell describes during his 1854 visit to Iowa. Compare it to Figure Two.

the 'Indian Lookout' is on the Etzel farm, near Jerry Stover's, or about on the line between West Lucas and Liberty townships." As we shall see, Wood was correct in his location.

The most important fact emerging from this division of opinion is that confusion existed already in 1883. Local residents, fond of telling the legendary tale of Indian Lookout, were no longer certain of just where the place was. What the early settlers meant by the term is the topic of much of the remainder of this article. Before examining this question, the plausibility of the legend, particularly the 1883 version, deserves further comment.

Some of the legendary significance of Indian Lookout stems from its association

with the Sac and Fox tribes which inhabited the region when white men first traveled and settled Johnson County.

As Cyrus Sanders approached the area in 1839 he recorded in his journal:²

April 5th. Started on to Napoleon arrived there a little while before night found it a place beautifully situated on the Iowa river with one miserable hut in it took up quarters there

April 6th Went down the river 2½ miles to a trading house kept by the American fur company saw a great many Indians—

April 10th Went down to the trading house found several hundred Indians camped near it visited several lodges and among the rest that of one of their chiefs and took a smoke with him he appeared very friendly and would often repeat Nish-

²*Iowa Journal of History and Politics*, 37, No. 1 (January 1939), 65-66.

a-shin Moco-man (ie good White man). bought a buckskin to face my pantaloons and a pair of shoes

April 12th. Finished my pantaloons about noon when the Sheriff came along and invited me to go with him to summons the first Jurors that were ever summoned in Johnson County it being a good chance to see the country and get acquainted with the people I of course went along, it took us two days to complete our circuit—

Some of the early traders who preceded Sanders to Iowa mingled with these aborigines and were fluent in their dialects. Prominent in this group are Andrew D. Stephen and the fur trader, John Gilbert. As late as 1838 the Fox Chief Poweshiek presided over a large village a mile and a

quarter directly east of Indian Lookout on the east side of the Iowa River. Perhaps such men as Gilbert or Stephen picked up the story of Indian Lookout through contact with the local tribesmen.

Verbal evidence from the Indians themselves is hard to come by, but Edgar Harlan, Curator of the Iowa Department of History, interviewed Poweshiek's descendants living at Tama in 1928 and learned from a man named Young Bear:³

In the old days our people had experienced hard times. They were constantly in danger of being attacked by other Indians, and so the men are taught to be alert and watchful, and to observe every

³"An Original Study of Mesquakie (Fox) Life, IV," *Annals of Iowa* (3rd ser.), 20, No. 2 (October 1935), 126.

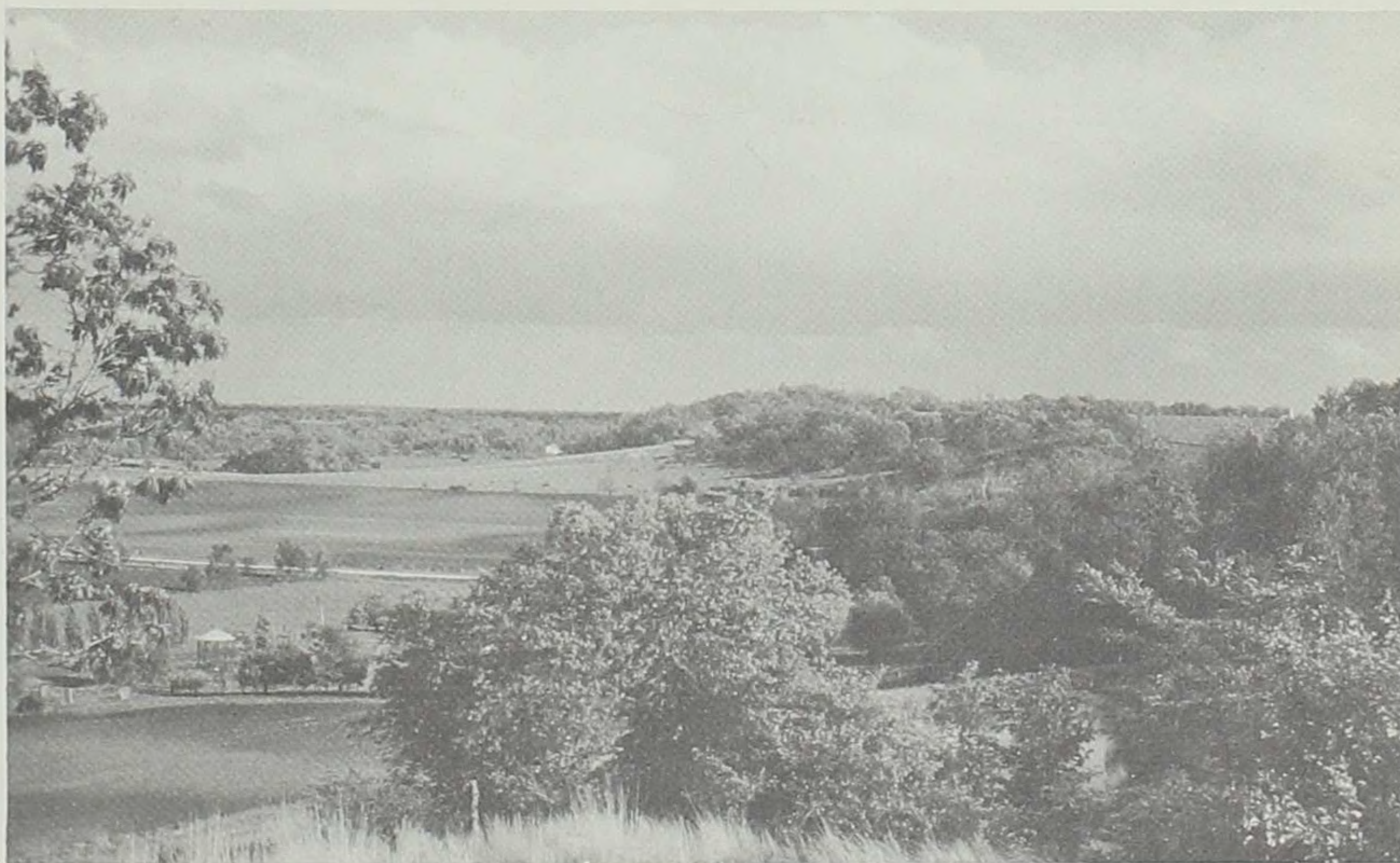


Figure Two. A view of the bluff south of Iowa City taken by the author in 1971. The camera is looking southeast toward the southeastern quarter of Section 33. The relationship of the horizon line, the valley floor, and the angle of the bluff is strikingly similar to Yewell's sketch.

sign and know it. . . . And many times in the villages the men are sent out to be on the lookout and to see if they can find any strange signs, and so it is that their men are always prepared and always ready to answer any call to protect their homes.

The practice of vigilance at "lookouts" is thus corroborated by both white and Indian sources and is a natural activity of a hunting culture, particularly when people are wary of their neighbors. The "perpetual warfare" of the Sac and Fox with the Sioux is well documented in memoir, letter, and treaty and needs no elaboration here. Looking backward from

the perspective of the 1830's, the Sac and Fox were themselves recent settlers of Johnson County and may have followed earlier habits and paths.

In short, the 1883 account of the legend of Indian Lookout, if corrected for location, is both plausible and in harmony with normal patterns of Indian life. It is within reason to assume the legend is based on fact, especially in light of further evidence. One of the important problems, however, is the confusion which arose in the nineteenth century over the exact location of Indian Lookout.



Courtesy of the University of Iowa Library, Special Collections.

Figure Three. Another of Yewell's sketches, dated October 29, 1854, a view from Indian Lookout, looking eastward.

G.H.Y.

"'Indian Look-Out,' below Iowa City. G.H.Y. Oct 28th 1854"—reads the inscription on the pencil drawing which is the earliest known depiction of this location. The artist was an early Iowan who has provided further verbal and graphic information about the landmark.

George Henry Yewell (1830-1923) was a distinguished and cosmopolitan painter and portraitist. Among his works are some of Iowa's masterpieces, including portraits of such Iowa notables as Governors Robert Lucas and Samuel J. Kirkwood. Born in Maryland in 1830, Yewell came to Iowa City with his mother in 1841. An earnest diarist, his entry for November 11, 1849 (preserved in the Yewell collection in the University of Iowa Library) shows that Yewell participated actively in the rituals of western life:

To-morrow we go upon our Annual Fall Hunt. Spent the day making preparations for it. Our party will be Jacob H. Stover, Thomas Hess, Thomas M. Banbury, Morgan Reno, Dewitt Berryhill and myself. To these add Old Jake's dog "Ponto" and the grey mare.

12th — The morning was clear and frosty. Seven o'clock found us all at Stover's door, and we were soon under way, crossing the river at Metcalf's. At the "Indian Look-out" we loaded our guns, and after crossing Old Man's creek at Uncle Johnny Smith's, four of them made a circuit to the right

Yewell left Iowa in 1851 to attend art

classes at the New York Academy of Design, but when he returned home for a working visit in 1854 he again went on a fall hunt "five miles in the country, and staid three days enjoying myself immensely." On this occasion we also know the results were greater than a successful hunt.

We rambled over the prairies upon foot and horseback. *I made some pencil sketches*, and improved my stock of health and spirits greatly. There is everything to be gained in 'going to Nature' no matter in what way it is done one of the boys shot a fine, fat buck in the prairie not more than half-a-mile from the house. We hitched up the wagon—went out and hauled him to the house—strung him up—rolled up our sleeves and skinned and dressed him, and lived upon venison the remainder of the time. [Emphasis added.]

When he made the sketch inscribed "Indian Look-Out" on October 28, 1854, Yewell recently had worked on his first commission, namely, "to make a series of vignette drawings of buildings, residences and street views of the town, to grace the margin of a new map of Iowa City." The artist's handiwork illustrated J. H. Millar's map of 1854. Fifteen of Yewell's drawings survive from this period of his Iowa City residence. The modern locations of seven of these scenes can be accurately fixed, no fewer than five involving the Indian Lookout neighborhood.

Indian Lookout was destined to enter into at least one more facet of Yewell's life. On July 4, 1855, he took Miss Mary

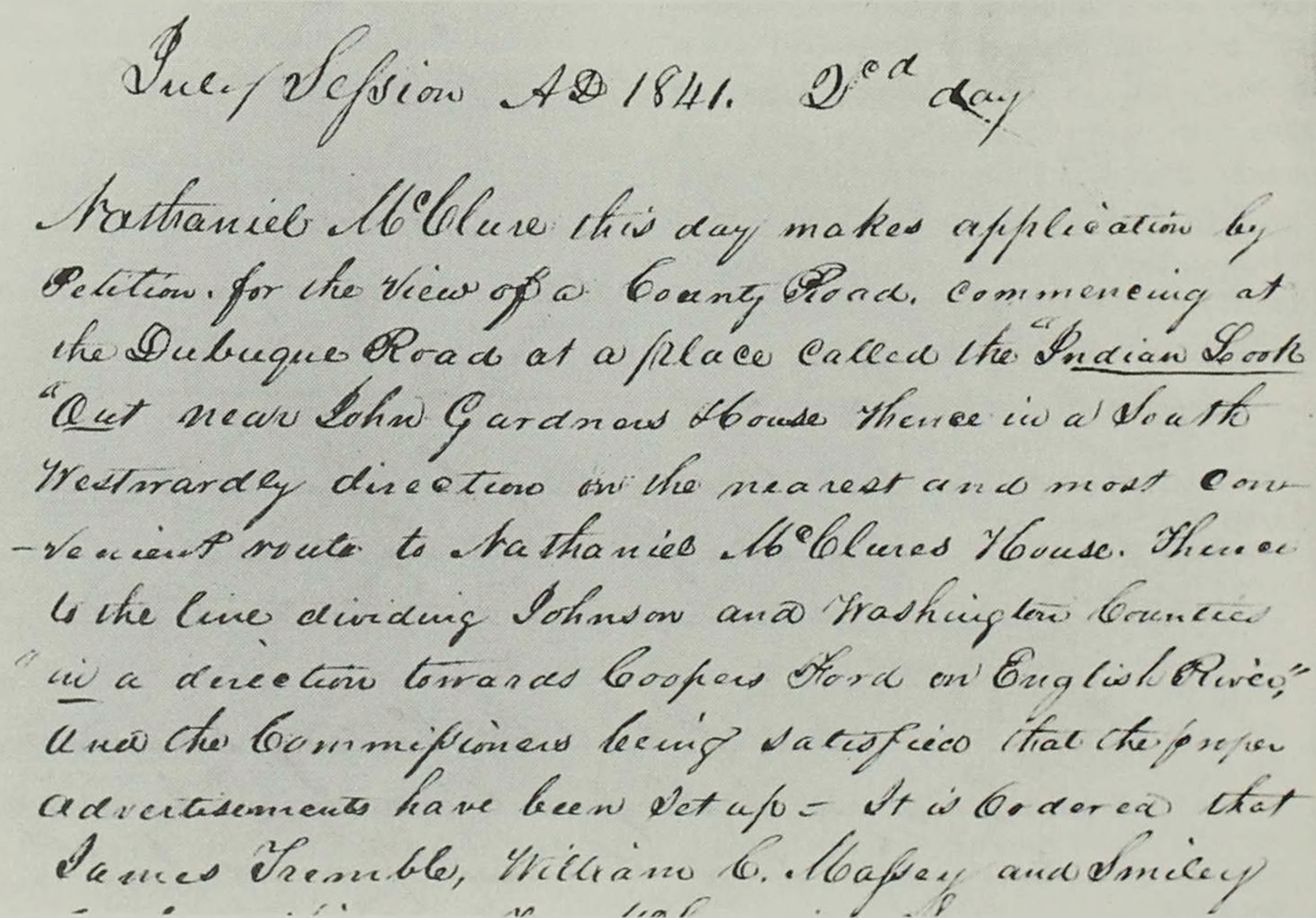
E. Coast on a picnic jaunt "to the 'Indian Lookout,' a high bluff where an extensive view is obtained of the winding river, woods, fields, prairies, and groves." Yewell's allusion to lofty heights (similar to that of Irish) must be considered in proper context. On this July 4th outing the young artist was afflicted with a form of giddiness not necessarily related to altitude: Miss Coast later became Mrs. George Yewell.

Yewell's contribution to our knowledge of Indian Lookout is considerable, and unique in its testimony. The sketch of the site provides a visual link of a kind unavailable from other sources. His picture of Indian Lookout helps confirm the identity of the landmark.

The Public Records

The graphic appeal of Yewell's testimony is buttressed by the more formal designation of Indian Lookout in the early public records of Johnson County. The references are scattered and in a way, a puzzle to the modern inquisitor. A careful sifting of the evidence shows, however, that Indian Lookout was and is a definite place. To proceed we must carefully pick out bits and pieces of information from sources which may not be directly related to one another. Certain key elements allow us to trace the existence of the landmark.

Documents surrounding a road proposed by Nathaniel McClure, south of Iowa City, form the first clues. The John-



July Session AD 1841. 2^d day

Nathaniel McClure this day makes application by Petition, for the view of a County Road, commencing at the Dubuque Road at a place called the Indian Lookout near John Garano's House thence in a South Westwardly direction in the nearest and most convenient route to Nathaniel McClure's House. Thence to the line dividing Johnson and Washington Counties in a direction towards Coopers Ford on English River; and the Commissioners being satisfied that the proper advertisements have been set up - It is ordered that James Fremble, William C. Maffey and Smiley

Figure Four. A reproduction of the Johnson County Commissioners' "Minutes" for July 6, 1841.

son County Board of Commissioners recorded in their *Minutes* for July 6, 1841:

Nathaniel McClure this day makes application by Petition, for the view of a County Road, commencing at the Dubuque Road at a place called the "Indian Look" Out near John Gardners House thence in a South Westwardly direction on the nearest and most convenient route to Nathaniel McClures House. Thence to the line dividing Johnson and Washington Counties in a 'direction' towards Coopers Ford on English River.

Three important conclusions emerge from the petition: first, that Indian Lookout was by name a reference point for early Johnson County inhabitants; second, the Dubuque Road will be an important focus of information which should help to locate Indian Lookout more accurately; and third, John Gardner's house—undoubtedly the closest habitation in the neighborhood—may be a ready way to our goal. Keeping in mind these facts, and referring frequently to maps and surveys, we begin to fit the pieces together.

The County Commissioners appointed "viewers" to examine the location of McClure's road. These officials then went into the field, established the route, and recorded their findings in the *Record of Roads*. This evidence is preserved and states (p. 21):

Field Notes of Old Man's Creek or McClure's Road

Commencing at the old Indian look out near Gardners house

Thence South 38° West 320 Perches

Thence South 44° West 182 do . . .

It is here officially confirmed that Gardner's house was near Indian Lookout and also near the junction of the Dubuque and McClure roads. The reference to Old Man's Creek further strengthens the leg-

endary evidence.

A number of leads have been established to determine the location of Indian Lookout, already known as "old" in 1841. We first concentrate on Gardner, his property, and his family. Deed and federal patent records show that John Gardner was the first white owner of the southeast quarter of Section 33, and the adjacent southwest quarter of Section 34 in West Lucas Township.

Various sources yield many additional facts about this obscure South Carolinian. His household consisted of eight people in 1838 and the same number in 1847. His neighbor was Yale Hamilton. He was assessed 21¢ in personal property tax in 1838 and he served on the first grand jury in Johnson County (the body Cyrus Sanders helped summon while wearing his buckskin faced pantaloons). An important fact is that Gardner did not register a claim with the Johnson County Claim Association. His daughter married Jerry Stover, who was identified in the 1883 account.

But where on his property did Gardner build his house? The public records are silent, except for one fact: Gardner sold the south 80 acres of Section 34 a year after he bought them. In our quest for further knowledge the Gardners themselves seem uncooperative; in 1853, bucking the westward movement, the family moved back to Indiana, their home before coming to Iowa.

The Dubuque Road, associated with Indian Lookout by McClure's petition, furnishes a fresh set of clues. Of the documents describing this early federal "military road," one item has been neglected by historians—the very one which is most



informative, and may lead to the solution of our puzzle.

The Territorial Legislature had passed an act in 1839 calling for a road to be located from Dubuque, through the seat of government (soon to be the "City of Iowa"), to the Missouri border. R. C. Tilghman, an engineer of the Bureau of Topographic Engineers of the War Department, surveyed the route in the summer of 1839. He later reported that below the seat of government, "the line passes over a Prairie to Harris' Creek, Old man's creek, and thence to Davis' creek along a ridge, having crossed English river, thence over a level prairie to Mount Pleasant. . . ." The map of Tilghman's survey apparently has never before been published. It consists of seven large sheets, some dated 1839 on the back. As drawn, the map is upside down: north is at the bottom, south at the top. Figure Five shows the map with proper orientation (north at the top). (The inscriptions are then upside down, but it is easier to understand Tilghman's meaning.)

Figure Five. R. C. Tilghman's map of his survey of the Dubuque Road in 1839. This field map was drawn upside down, with north at the bottom. In order to clarify its relationship to other maps, it is shown here with north at the top. While this makes it necessary to turn the map in order to read the inscriptions, we can more easily compare it to Figure Six, a modern topographic map of the area. Key features of Tilghman's map are the location of the Dubuque Road (solid line down the middle) and the approximate location of Yale Hamilton's field (labeled as such, near the center of the map). The old Indian trail is shown as a dotted line. Tilghman's rendering of the bluff line is approximate. The course of the Iowa River has changed considerably since 1839.

Besides the location of the route of the Dubuque Road, Tilghman's map is important to the argument because the one settler it names in this area is Yale Hamilton. We know Hamilton was Gardner's neighbor from Claim Association data and the evidence of federal land patents. The Hamilton place, moreover, is one of the features drawn on Tilghman's map. Unfortunately, Tilghman's field notes are missing, never having been received in Washington. However, step by step, we can substitute independent and even more accurate records.

The Johnson County Claim Association Records give Hamilton's claim of September 12, 1838 in metes and bounds:

. . . beginning at a certain Dry Elm stub thence running west One mile to a certain white Oak tree thence south $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile to a certain hickory Stake Standing in the Prairie then East to a certain black oak tree standing on the Bank of the River thence North a $\frac{1}{2}$ mile to the place of beginning.

This places Hamilton west of the river and clarifies Tilghman's cartography. When the federal land surveyor, John Frierson, came along in August 1839, he drew "Yale Hamilton's field" astride the line between Section 28 and 33, just east of a ravine. Frierson's field notes are explicit about topography:

East Random between Secs 28 and 33—
15 chains Enter a deep ravine . . .
55 chains 50 links Descend bluff into Iowa bottom and enter Yale Hamilton's field
75 chains Leave Hamilton's field

Thus Tilghman's route for the Dubuque

Road hugs the foot of the bluff on the west past "Hamilton's," and climbs the hill to the south. There it leaves the dotted "Indian Trail to Old Mans' Creek"—the map so designates it farther along.

Reconstructions

The next step is to transfer Tilghman's information to the modern topographic map (see Figure Six), and determine where in Section 33 the 1839 Road lay. There is really no choice. The lowly gravel road up the hill must be a still-in-use segment of the Dubuque Road. The road to the southwest can only be the McClure Road, which will furnish further proof. (Its bearing can be easily checked with a protractor and compared with the McClure Road Field Notes.) The bluff extending from that point to the southeast must be the Indian Lookout.

Could the house (black square) or barn (rectangle) at the crest of the hill be Gardner's house? It is tempting to reach this conclusion. Homesteads and farm buildings have a way of staying put over the years. Using the information of McClure's petition, either location would fit. Anyone tramping over Gardner's original half-section would consider these sites. They would be on the Indian Trail, the best prospect for a road through the "desolate wilderness" of 1839 and one central to the property, sheltered from the higher prairie, and provided with flowing springs the year around.

Let us double-check our deductions, however logical, and especially those about Gardner's house.

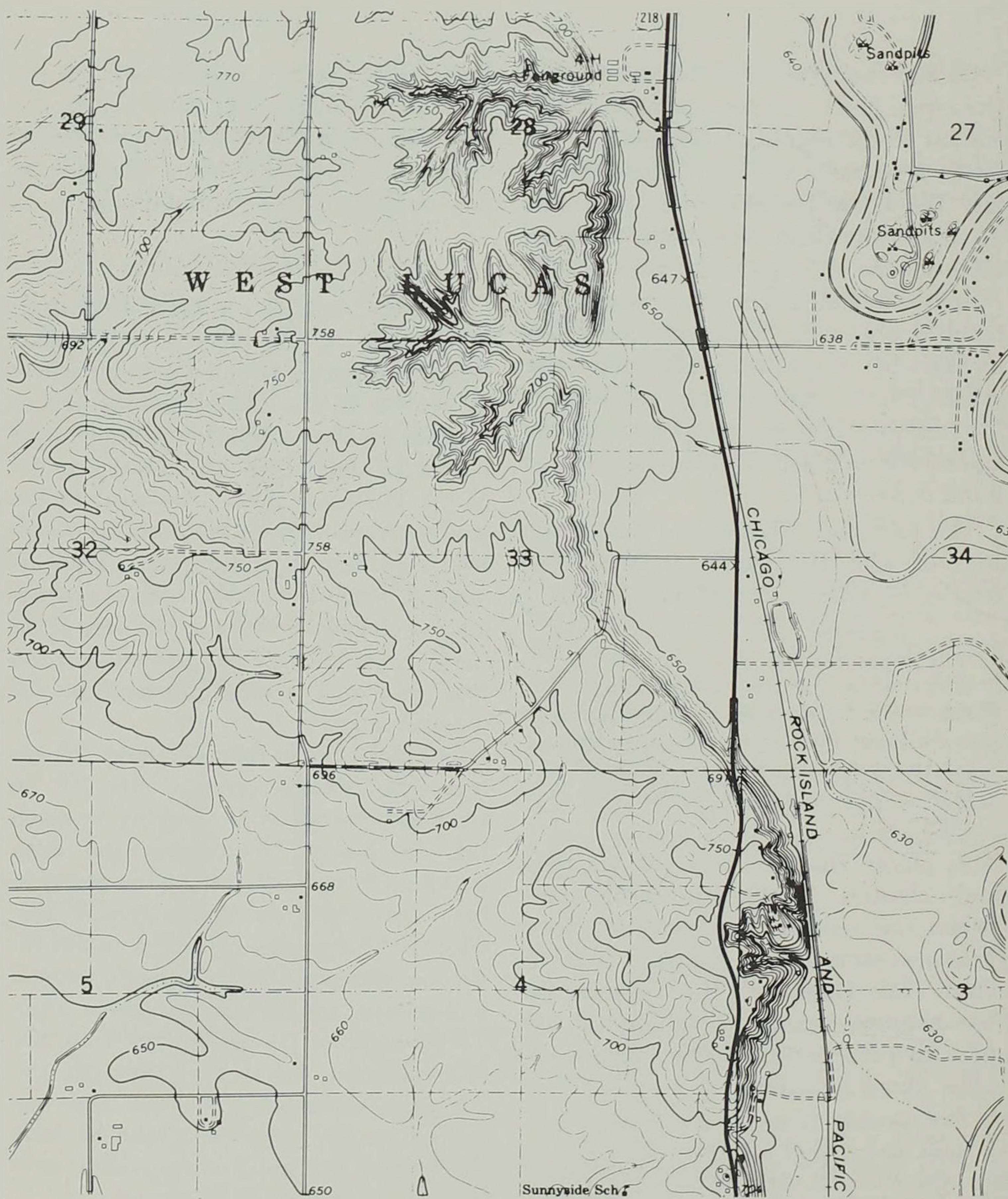


Figure Six. A 1965 USGS topographic map of the Indian Lookout area, showing Section 33. The solid black line is Highway 218. The gravel road turns off 218 at "644" and is designated by a double line (middle of the map). The gravel road first turns south to the crest of the bluff and then to the southwest. The black square and rectangle are at the point where the road turns southwest.

Additional information jolts us. An elderly daughter of Jerry Stover recalled in 1943 that family lore placed the Gardners on the *north* 80 acres of Section 34.⁴ Suppose this memory could be verified; suppose indeed that Gardner had lived on *either* 80-acre tract of Section 34; suppose his house had been (as seems likely) the *only* house in the vicinity. Gardner's house would still have appeared to be *near* the beginning of the McClure Road by the viewers assembled there.

Happily, with regard to the Indian Lookout, McClure Road information confirms our conclusions. Before proceeding with that story, it is useful to have at hand the succession of owners of the southeast quarter of Section 33. After the Gardners, they are Phineas Harris (March-September, 1853); David S. and Lucy Miller of Westmoreland County, Pennsylvania (1853-1865); Leonhard Etzel (1865-1866); Anne Etzel (1866-1892); John and Iva Tucker (1892-1907); Louis and Carrie Ruppenkamp (1907-1959); Ralph and Beulah Rayner (1959-1961 and 1964); and the author's family (1961 and 1964-present).

The confirmations of the location of Indian Lookout come from two later changes in the McClure Road recorded in the official *Record of Roads*. An 1856 petition of Jerry Stover (the widower of Gardner's daughter returned from California, now remarried, and settled for life in his house on the McClure Road in Section 4, Liberty Township) located

this portion of the road precisely for the first time by showing its relationship to section lines. Additionally, in a change sought by Isaac Smith in 1862 there is the final confirmation (see Figure Seven). Here the Indian Lookout is platted and located in the surveyor's Field Notes for all time; it is indeed the massif pointing diagonally to the southeast from the intersection of the Dubuque and McClure Roads. By 1862 the house *at* the Indian Lookout is David and Lucy Miller's. It faced east. The proof is complete.

The loose threads of legend and evidence now tie together. David Wood, the lawyer who set the record straight in 1883, was correct in asserting that Indian Lookout was on the Etzel farm. Tilghman, in the stretch from Hamilton's to the top of Indian Lookout, recognized the wisdom of countless Indian footsteps when he superimposed the Dubuque Road on the Indian trail. Tilghman's route went straight on over the hill, while the Indian trail followed the crest of the bluff before turning southward. Who is to deny that this section of bluff may have been, in fact as well as legend, an Indian "look-out"?

How far southward did the term apply? All the sources quoted here agree that it was a particular "knob," "point," "high Bluff," "rounded hill," or "High knoll"—not an indefinite extension of bluff. This is consonant with the Yewell sketch, the map data, and the account which confines the term to the 160-acre Etzel farm.

The latter interpretation also fits with

⁴Euphemia Trine, "History of Joseph Stover and His Descendants," May 1, 1943, unpublished typescript.

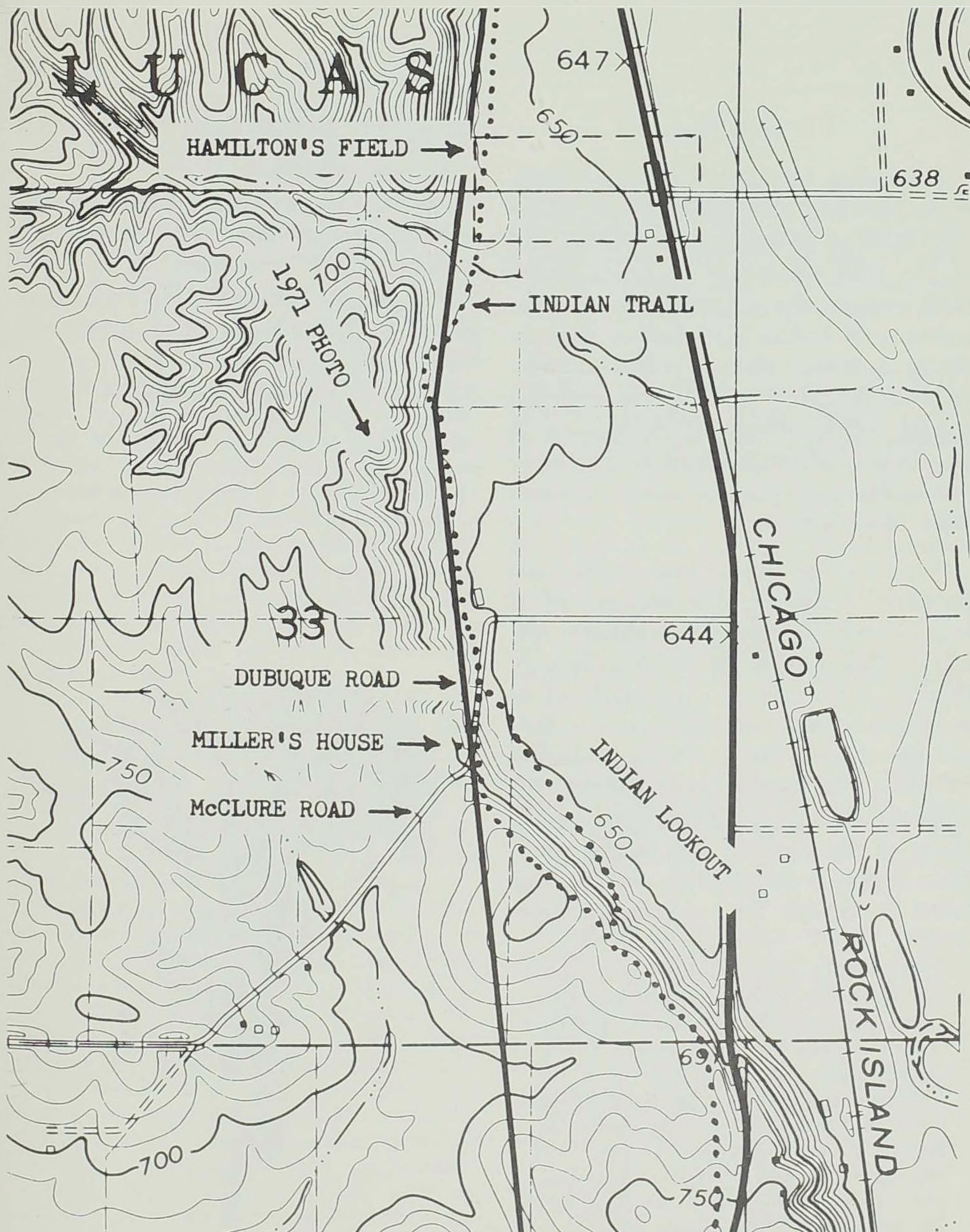


Figure Eight. A labeled version of the 1965 topographic map showing Hamilton's field, the Indian trail (dotted line), the vantage point of the 1971 photo, the location of the Dubuque Road (solid line down the middle), Miller's house, the McClure Road, and Indian Lookout.

Perspective

The Indian Lookout of George Yewell, of the 1841 and 1862 public records, of the 1883 account (as corrected by Wood), and of the 1938 *Guide* are all one and the same location. Since Yewell's day the appearance of Indian Lookout has scarcely changed. It was already a special place in Johnson County in 1841. Although the legend which brought it recognition is largely beyond the reach of investigation, the Indian Lookout is secure as a landmark of early Iowa.

A sense of the importance of place, the harmony of the world of nature and of man, a reverence for the abundance and beauty that sustain life: they were only shadows of the ethic of a defeated culture in Johnson County on Independence Day of 1838. It was the day Iowa became a Territory. The settlers gathered at John Gilbert's trading post. The special significance of the occasion was explained to their neighbor, Poweshiek, and he was asked to respond. He is reported to have said:⁵

Soon I shall go to a new home and you will plant corn where my dead sleep. Our towns, the paths we have made, and the flowers we love will soon be yours. I have moved many times and have seen the white man put his feet in the tracks of the Indian and make the earth into fields and gardens. I know that I must go away and you will be so glad when I am gone that you will soon forget that the meat and the lodge-fire of the Indian have been

forever free to the stranger and at all times he has asked for what he has fought for, the right to be free.

After the Indian trails were replaced by settlers' roads or forgotten, after the area had become a crossroads for a fertile region, its name persisted, reminding people of their predecessors of many millennia.



June 2 Sept 16th 1874

⁵C. R. Aurner, *Leading Events in Johnson County Iowa* (Cedar Rapids: Western Hist. Press, 1912), I, 59.